

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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Conyers Praises Signing of Election Reform But Notes that “Without Funding, the Bill is an Empty Promise”

_____ Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee and Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, was the co-author with Senator Chris Dodd of the election reform bill that was the basis for this new law. In response to the President’s signing of this bill, Conyers issued the following statement:

“In March of 2001, Senator Chris Dodd and I had a vision for an election reform bill with minimum federal standards providing crucial guarantees to protect an individual's right to vote. Many political elites told us we were unrealistic and many politicians opposed us. Today, our vision has come to pass.

And today, the White House is again playing games with election reform. As the President signs this bill, he has already vetoed funding for election reform. On August 13, the President vetoed a supplemental appropriations bill that contained a \$400 million downpayment for election reform. It remains to be seen whether this, like the education reform ‘Leave No Child Behind Act,’ is a signed authorization bill for reform that becomes worthless without a commitment to fund it. Without funding this bill is an empty shell and the President's signature is a cruel and empty promise.

I would be less than honest if I didn't say that the White House utterly failed to lead on this issue. Despite requests from the Congressional Black Caucus and civil rights activists, the President refused to push for a bill. We had hoped in the aftermath of Florida 2000 that a sense of evenhandedness would have compelled the President to advocate for strong reforms, instead the White House lauded a weak House bill and scarcely acknowledged the stronger Senate bill, which this legislation is patterned after.

While this bill will help solve some of the problems in Florida, there are some problems which can only be fixed through vigilance. Recent reports indicate that Republicans are using fair tales of fraud to intimidate minority voters throughout the nation. Callers in Florida have been urging democratic voters to cast absentee ballots after election day and thereby nullify their votes. It is my hope the Bush Department of Justice will prosecute these abuses.”

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